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ONE of the architects of the December 31, 1981 coup d'etat, ex-Corporal Matthew Adabuga, yesterday told the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) that the Chairman of the erstwhile Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), Flt-Lt J. J. Rawlings, ordered the killing of the three High Court judges and a retired military officer in 1982. He said Flt-Lt Rawlings popped champagne, after he was informed that the four persons had been murdered. Cpl Adabuga, the first of exiled Ghanaians associated with the 31st December coup to come down to testify before the commission, is now the Public Relations Officer of the Red Cross Society in Oslo, Norway.

Giving an account of events prior to the 31st December coup and thereafter, Cpl Adabuga said he and his colleagues realised rather too late that Flt Lt Rawlings had "fooled and misled us".

He, therefore, expressed his regret for "all that I did in bringing Ghana to its knees under the misguided leadership of Flt Lt Jerry John Rawlings".

He narrated how Flt Lt Rawlings allegedly conned them into believing that the late former President, Dr Hilla Limann, was in support of the coup d'etat, following what Flt Lt Rawlings said was an attempt by the Akan group in the People's National Party (PNP) to topple the late leader.

Cpl Adabuga said he was in the office with Capt (rtd) Kojo Tsikata, Sgt Akata Pore and Flt-Lt Rawlings, when Mr Amartey Kwei came to inform them that they had finished the assignment on the judges but "I did not get the message clear then and even after the announcement".

He said Flt Lt Rawlings did not utter a word and went to the refrigerator to take champagne to drink.

He said it was Messrs Amedeka, Dzandu and Tekpor who came to confide in him during the Special Investigations Board (SIB) probe that it was Flt Lt Rawlings who asked them to kill the judges and the retired military officer.

Cpl Adabuga said Flt Lt Rawlings and Capt Tsikata also directed Amedeka and his colleagues to burn the smocks they used in the operation at Bundase to eliminate all traces. He said they confided in him because he was the person they trusted as Flt Lt Rawlings and Capt Tsikata had refused to stand by them.

He said Amedeka narrated to him how Mrs Justice Koranteng, one of the murdered judges, got up in flames to chase the killers and was overpowered by Amedeka's chanting and incantations.

According to Cpl Adabuga, he confronted Flt Lt Rawlings after he had been briefed but he "told me it was a state secret".

He said a threw a blow at Flt Lt Rawlings but he managed to dodge it after which he complained to him

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about how he had been playing northerners against Akans to stage the coup.

He said it was from that stage that the two of them became enemies and that he and other soldiers then plotted to kill Rawlings but were allegedly given out by one Boakye.

Cpl Adabuga then described how Flt Lt Rawlings tried to eliminate his perceived enemies leading to the killing of Eric Asare and Giwa were killed in an accident while there was another attempt to kill him (Adabuga). In all, seven persons died in the accident involving him (Adabuga) on the Burma Camp - La road.

He told the commission how only 10 soldiers including C. C. Addai, George Agyekum, Amedeka, Amidu, Rawlings, Gbafer, Cudjoe and himself, struggled to stage the coup after Flt Lt Rawlings had taken them to the Achimota Forest to brief them about the alleged plans of Dr Limann for a military take over.

Cpl Adabuga said when his team realised they faced a heavy resistance and on seeing three dead bodies, Flt Lt Rawlings wanted to chicken out but "I arrested him and put him in one of the MOWAGS because I said he could not abandon us".

He said Flt Lt Rawlings was not actually part of the team that fought to capture power but was used to make the announcement at the GBC because he was the only officer, stressing that "If we had another officer with us, Rawlings would have been shot immediately he chickened out and asked us to escape to Benin".

He told the commission that the former First Lady, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings was arrested at the Kotoka International Airport attempting to export marijuana to the United Kingdom but Flt Lt Rawlings intervened that there was big time money in it and that because the economy was bad, it was important that they exported marijuana to earn some foreign exchange.

"My Lord, we all became excited at this piece of information. Adjei Boadi and myself immediately acquired a piece of land at Adeiso to cultivate marijuana but after the land had been ploughed, we had instructions to plant corn," he said.

Cpl Adabuga said in the heat of the revolution, a friend of Flt Lt Rawlings, Mr Riyadh gave them information about Syrians and Lebanese gold and diamond dealers resulting in raids on their houses and shops to retrieve all the precious minerals as well as trips to the Obuasi mine by Rawlings for gold.

"I want Rawlings to account for all the gold and diamonds that were taken during the raids and give me my share", he said.

Cpl Adabuga, who prior to his testimony had asked for immunity from prosecution, said Flt Lt Rawlings instructed Lt Blood Dziraku to lead soldiers including himself to Tsito to kill people in connection with the conflict there.

He also described attempts by him and some people, including Lt Gen Joshua Hamidu, Major Sulemana, and Baba Kankani as well as civilians to get rid of the PNDC regime but failed.

He said the junior ranks, in view of their tender ages and inexperience were misled by Rawlings into thinking that "we were doing the nation some good by our regrettable acts".

He said he was only 24 years at the time and that it was easy to pollute the minds of the other ranks.

"I now challenge Flt Lt Rawlings, the principal perpetrator and instigator of most of these crimes, if he has any conscience and any honour left in him at all, to come out openly and without mincing words, acknowledge his crimes and guilt, apologise genuinely to the people of Ghana and asked for their forgiveness so that we can all have true reconciliation and peace," he said.

When asked if civilians were part of the coup, he said the only civilian who was closed to the events was one Apostle Barnabas, a journalist who was only covering the events and that Messrs Tsatsu Tsikata and Chris Atim came on board after the take over.

Lt Gen Emmanuel Erskine, a member of the commission, expressed the hope that serving soldiers will learn from the account of Cpl Adabuga about how one mistake of misjudgement had plunged the country into social and economic mess.

He said the narration also exposed a lot of weaknesses in the system at that time and expressed the hope that the weaknesses have been corrected.

He said Cpl Adabuga from his account, showed a lot of leadership, courage and sacrifice and expressed the hope that "our officers will learn from these three qualities of yours".

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Most Rev Gabriel Palmer-Buckle, also a member of the commission, said the account of Cpl Adabuga provides a number of leads for the media to research into, especially the ethnic-tribal factor in the Ghanaian body-politic and the abuse of human rights.

When he drew Cpl Adabuga's attention to the fact that his evidence was very incriminating and asked if the evidence could be subjected to further verification, Cpl Adabuga said he stands by it and ever ready to meet any of those mentioned to challenge him.

When Uborr Labal Balafu II, a member of the commission, asked if he or any other member of the team benefited from the gold, Cpl Adabuga said he did not benefit and that "I understand George Agyekum is a pastor in his village, so I believe he is not prosperous".

In response to another question, Cpl Adabuga said he was a product of the Junior Leaders Company, popularly known as Boys Company in Kumasi and that many of them became enemies of the revolution.

When he took his turn, a former Editor of the Ghana News Agency, Mr Ansah Barnor, narrated how he was forced to resign for allegedly leaking news report on the SIB probe to the Voice of America.

He told the commission that although he was reporting for the West Africa Magazine, there was a VOA correspondent at the sittings and that the VOA report gave account of the contradicting statements of Capt Tsikata in his written and oral evidence as well as corroborated evidence by Mr Amartey Kwei and Mr P. V. Obeng, among others.

He said Capt Tsikata did not take kindly to the report and this created problems for him resulting in his forced resignation at the age of 32.

Mr Barnor, who said he is now impoverished and often walk from Chorkor to the Castle and to the NPP head office to seek assistance for his reinstatement, said Capt Tsikata did not take kindly to it because there was a unit which rewrote all the GNA reports and sent out to the media houses.

He said although the other media houses had correspondents at the SIB sittings, it was the GNA reports they used. Mr Barnor, who broke down in tears and held up hearing for several minutes, pleaded with the commission to help him out because he is now a desperate person.

Prof Henrietta Mensah-Bonsu, a member of the commission, then said Mr Barnor's account will go a long way to explain some of the pressures the state-media go through and why the state-media have been wrongly accused of always carrying commissioning of KVIPs and markets.

On his part, Mr Samuel Kwadwo Boateng, told the commission how some soldiers raided his drinking bar at Adabraka in 1982 and took all the drinks and himself away to Burma Camp.

He said he was tortured and released a day after and told not to come back again.

He said he later met Cpl Anack Seidu, who led the operation, at the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation where he worked as a supervisor, where he (Seidu) apologised for the incident.

When he took his turn, ex-Cpl John Kwasi Attipoe narrated how he was picked up from the 6BN in Tamale and interrogated about an alleged coup plot by Major Sulemana and Cpl John Adongo.

He said he and other detainees were severely tortured before being taken to various prisons.

He said for the seven years that he spent in detention, he was shuttled between Usher Fort, Nsawam, Winneba, Anomabo, Tarkwa and Sekondi prisons before he was released.

He said he knew nothing about the allegation levelled against him but the soldiers would not believe him. Cpl Attipoe expressed his appreciation to Mr Kwame Pianim and Amnesty International among others, who stood by him during those days in prison.

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